

PREFACE

It's no longer possible to ignore what is happening to institutions. We have witnessed the failure of internal controls in corporations, accounting firms, regulatory agencies, and the media. The buckling in intelligence gathering, health care, education, and emergency response has been reported in detail. The automotive industry, technology sector, the airlines, and financial services are a shambles. Although it is an exaggeration to say that every organization is in crisis, it is clear that there is a fundamental flaw in the current approach to management.

As an organizational psychologist, I've spent the last three decades managing in large corporations undergoing major change, consulting with companies across a wide range of industries, and conducting hundreds of profiles of executives, managers, and staff. I've worked with firms large and small on projects involving change—shifting marketplaces, mergers, acquisitions, downsizings, and growth. That's a lot of time spent observing and understanding how people behave in companies undergoing change, during good times and bad.

In 1977, I had an insight about how the mind operates. I'd been reviewing the psychological literature on emotion and had developed a new working hypothesis about how *thinking* and *feeling* interact in the mind, which could explain how organizations affect the perception and behavior of people.

As I worked with more and more companies, I began looking at people's behavior in the workplace using my new model. It was fascinating to see how applicable it was to the commonplace behaviors in organizations. I decided to develop it further.

There was a fascinating unity of behavior in companies, and if what I'd uncovered about the existence of the *Mind Field* was true, it was cause for deep concern, because it would reveal a fundamental flaw in our approach to management. I continued to apply the

The Mind Field: What's Missing in Running Our Organizations

TOM TAVARES, PH.D.
Sample Chapter

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model, coined the “Mind Field”, to improve organizational performance, particularly in conditions of rapid change. It was applicable under many different conditions and with companies across a broad spectrum of industries.

During the last 30 years, two things have happened: the pace and complexity of change have continued to increase, and breakdowns in organizations are occurring with greater frequency.

Sometimes companies are in crisis, sometimes they're mired down and can't move forward, and other times they're performing above the industry average but just can't get to the next level. If any of these sounds like your company, you're not alone, and there is nothing wrong with your leaders or employees—we have a gap in knowledge about management.

All is not lost. In unusual cases, a new leader arrives, a team clicks, or a project goes just right, behavior changes, and the performance of the organization takes off. *The Mind Field* explains why traditional solutions fail to produce lasting changes in companies, and how to replicate the effects of randomly occurring improvements in everyday behavior. This book reveals the hidden psychological dimension of organizations, overlooked in the current approach to management. *The Mind Field* describes the impact that the very structure of organizations has on the perception and behavior of people and how it diminishes the speed and flexibility of companies. This invisible barrier to performance locks companies into operating in silos and cuts off access to the 90 per cent of minds necessary to thrive under conditions of rapid change.

My goal, in writing this book, is to build understanding and to mobilize action. In my experience, people are open to new ideas if the research is rigorous, the data is presented accurately, and the explanation makes sense and is consistent with what they are experiencing.

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To distill the information gathered over three decades* and reveal this hidden barrier to organizational performance, I have invented a company called ACT Inc. Although the firm and its people are entirely fictional, they will likely be entirely familiar to you. As you read the story of ACT Inc., which comprises the first half of this book, you will see your organization's challenges in its problems, and your own colleagues in its people. I will tell you now that the problems faced by ACT Inc. are not solved in Part I. As in real life, there are no black-and-white solutions, no instantaneous happy endings. The means to the solution, rather, is found in Part II, which explains the concept of the *Mind Field*, and applies it to the story of ACT Inc., which is an amalgam of real-life companies and people. Part II also comprises a practical, step-by-step guide to help you understand, and manage, the Mind Field in your firm.

Although traditional methods for influencing day-to-day behavior have not worked, new ideas can also pose risks. The model presented here is neither a theory nor a philosophy; nor is it something to 'believe in'. It is a framework for helping companies to make sense of the challenges they are facing. Although there is a logical progression to the five-stage process needed to manage the Mind Field, the one true test of this approach is whether it leads to observable improvements in the way people work together day-to-day and the overall performance of the business.

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Each step of the process builds on the previous one and increases the chances of achieving lasting change. Regardless of the individual or the organization, it begins with a fundamental shift in understanding about how you look at behavior in your company. However, knowledge is of little value unless it leads to more effective action. *The Mind Field* provides a framework to mobilize executives, middle managers and individual employees. It is an integrated and practical approach to transforming business performance.

We are facing dire threats in both business and government. As we all struggle with the buckling that is occurring across public and private sector institutions, I hope you will take the time to carefully consider the Mind Field. As change accelerates, the gap grows between the speed and flexibility of day-to-day behavior and the demands on organizations.

The Mind Field is a systemic factor, at the root of the crisis we are facing. It is also the key to boosting organizational performance and meeting the core challenges of our time: globalization, technological change, national security, health care, education, and the environment.

Please join us in our dialogue about the Mind Field on our website, at www.tavaresconsulting.com.

—Tom Tavares, Ph.D.



CHAPTER 1

THE PUZZLE

It was 10 a.m. on a crystal-clear Sunday in July. I was in my office preparing for a meeting the next day with John Hagen, the CEO of ACT Inc.* I had finished a report on the company's efforts to implement a new strategy and had sent it to ACT's executive team on Friday, but the meeting promised to be tough sledding, and I wanted to review my notes one last time.

The findings from my interviews with ACT's executives, managers, and employees reflected what most people are experiencing today in their organizations.

For the most part, people liked their co-workers and took pride in doing their jobs. They were realistic about the frustrations of life in organizations: the politics, the inconsistency between actions and stated values, people's egos, and the hidden agendas. In the past, employees had found that the positives of working at ACT Inc.—good compensation, job opportunities, and developmental programs—had more than compensated for these irritations, and the staff had soldiered on. For the past several years, however, they had been finding this harder to do. There was widespread confusion about the direction of the business, the list of daily challenges was growing, conflicts over priorities and resources were boiling over, and people's workloads were increasing to unsustainable levels.

Problems once regarded as nuisances were affecting the quality of employees' personal lives and undermining the performance of the business.

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I had heard grumbling from every quarter; In finance: “Managers conceal problems until things are a mess. The farther we go with implementing the new strategy, the worse it gets.” In operations: “Executives switch priorities all the time; we joke about the ‘10-second’ plan.” In IT: “Management just wants to make their numbers. They don’t stop to consider the technical problems or the work required for the changes they tell us to make.”

Executives grumbled that employees seemed to have plenty of complaints but never any solutions. Managers said they were tired of the politics in the company, and that people were more concerned about protecting their jobs than taking care of the customer. And employees were weary of hearing their supervisors tell them how much they were valued, while at the same time ignoring their concerns and neglecting to recognize their achievements.

While the people I interviewed all had similar feelings about the current situation, they had avoided talking openly about their frustrations on the job.

They may have spoken privately with a trusted colleague or vented their frustrations at home, but they all felt it would have been risky to speak frankly at work about how people were behaving. With jobs on the line, no one wanted to appear negative or cause offense. As a result, they had no idea that their experiences were widely shared.

The majority of staff understood the marketplace’s new realities and was committed to doing what it took to keep the company competitive and jobs secure. They were trying to adjust to the pressure. What frustrated them was all the effort wasted in sloppy communication, unproductive meetings, management’s failure to address the real problems, departments working in silos, and people not delivering on their commitments. It all seemed so unnecessary. After all, people simply needed to be more disciplined and thoughtful in performing their jobs.

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In reality, the executives, managers, and employees of ACT Inc. were all sensing an increasingly serious business risk, but from different points of view. Livelihoods were at stake, confusion was spreading and frustrations were boiling over, which was why I was in my office on a fine Sunday morning in July to review the file.

Not too long ago, I had written an article on “managing change” for a national newspaper. It was about how it is no longer possible to ignore what is happening in organizations. Sometimes companies are in crisis; for example, the automotive industry and financial services sector. In some cases, firms get bogged down trying to make changes and can’t move forward. In other instances, businesses perform above the industry average but somehow can’t get to the next level. A few days after the article had come out, I’d gotten a call from the CEO of ACT Inc., John Hagen. He said the article had started him thinking about his own company, and he wondered if I might have some insights that would help ACT Inc.